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ABSTRACT

"Te Whaariki," the "draft guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in [New Zealand] early childhood services," constitutes a set of principles which can guide practice, rather than a structure for curriculum planning. The guidelines have the potential to provide a theoretical rationale for the application of the concept of "educare" to early childhood services in New Zealand and to contribute to the growth of a sense of professionalism in early childhood education. Despite these positive features, there is a theoretical tension inherent in the curriculum model adopted by Te Whaariki which could limit the effectiveness of its implementation. This internal constraint is likely to be exacerbated by weakness in the knowledge base and training of early childhood practitioners. Te Whaariki contains high ideals, but there is currently an enormous gap between practice and the achievement of those ideals. In turn, bridging this gap poses considerable challenges to policy makers and early childhood educators alike. (Author/WJC)

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The Challenge of *Te Whaariki* for Future Developments in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

It is argued in this paper that *Te Whaariki*, the "Draft guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood services", constitutes a set of principles which can guide practice, rather than a structure for curriculum planning. The guidelines have the potential to provide a theoretical rationale for the application of the concept of "educare" to early childhood services in New Zealand and to contribute to the growth of a sense of professionalism in early childhood education. Despite these positive features, it is suggested there is a theoretical tension inherent in the curriculum model adopted by *Te Whaariki* which could limit the effectiveness of its implementation. This internal constraint is likely to be exacerbated by weaknesses in the knowledge base and training of early childhood practitioners.

Introduction

The production of *Te Whaariki*,* the Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services (Ministry of Education, 1993), constitutes a significant step for early education in New Zealand. Several features of the *Te Whaariki* curriculum development project justify this claim.

Firstly, within the Anglo-American industrialised countries the guidelines are probably unique in that the concepts of care and education are combined in a single curriculum (Kamerman, 1989). In this regard the guidelines give substance to the application of the educare concept to early childhood services in New Zealand. While the concept of educare is increasingly used to describe the New Zealand early childhood system (Smith, 1992), in the absence of a shared theoretical basis for early childhood programmes it is debatable if New Zealand's integrated early education system could be any more successful in avoiding a care-education dichotomy than systems where responsibility for care and education services is vested in different government bodies. In such systems, responsibility for child *care* services is usually vested in a government department concerned with health, welfare, or community development, while preschools, or *educational* programmes, are the responsibility of departments of education. For example, in Australia care and education are still characterised by differences in hours of operation, training, and industrial conditions for staff despite the fact that children within the same age range are catered for by these programmes (Alderson, 1992). In New Zealand, although all licensed early childhood services are responsible to the Ministry of Education, and qualifications for childcare and kindergarten are now integrated, the variation in conditions for staff working in different types of services remains an impediment to the development of an educare service. Given these structural constraints, the development of early childhood curriculum guidelines has special significance for its potential to strengthen the move towards an integrated service. By providing a theoretical rationale for the educare concept, *Te Whaariki* should facilitate communication between different services.

* A detailed description of the rationale and structure of *Te Whaariki* is included in Carr and May, this issue.

Secondly, the process of development of *Te Whaariki* involved a consultative process with practitioners which is important for its acceptance by the diverse groups involved in early education in New Zealand (Carr, 1993). The concept of curriculum has long been viewed with suspicion by early childhood educators who have tended to equate curriculum with a subject-based approach more typical of primary or secondary education. Consequently, the widespread acceptance of *Te Whaariki* in the early childhood sector (Murrow, 1995) attests the value of the lengthy consultative process. Unfortunately, there is also likely to be a negative side to an approach which is guided substantially by current practice; that is, a conservative "press" from practitioners towards maintaining current practice. In particular, I argue in a later section that the dominance of a developmental philosophy is likely to be maintained despite grounding the curriculum model in social and cultural contexts. I argue further that this conservative press needs to be balanced by comprehensive training which provides teachers with strong theoretical foundations as well as the confidence to reflect critically about their practice. Although few teacher educators would dispute this view, the impact of the National Qualifications Framework on the quality of teacher training is as yet unknown. Australian experience suggests, however, that in the early childhood field, adoption of competency-based models of training can limit, rather than expand theoretical components of training (Bissland, 1992; Gifford & Godhard, 1992).

Thirdly, the guidelines have made a momentous attempt to draw together the diverse strands of early education within the concept of *Te Whaariki* - or mat. Acknowledging the diversity of services within New Zealand is essential for several reasons which are essential to the successful implementation of *Te Whaariki*: namely, gaining practitioner acceptance of the guidelines, honouring the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi, and recognising the strong community "do-it-yourself" base to New Zealand early childhood services. In addition to these reasons which relate to aspects of the New Zealand early childhood context, the focus on diversity is in accordance with contemporary international perspectives which stress the importance of cultural contexts in both early education (e.g. Goffin, 1994; Spodek, 1991) and theories of development (e.g. Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992).

Notwithstanding the positive qualities outlined above, in the remainder of this paper I suggest that *Te Whaariki* provides a set of principles to guide practice and not a structure for curriculum planning. This argument is constructed from an analysis of several salient issues which are evident from a critical examination of the *Te Whaariki* curriculum model. These issues are addressed in the following sub-sections.

Theoretical Foundations of *Te Whaariki*

For many years, the predominant philosophy underpinning mainstream early childhood programmes has been a developmental philosophy. This perspective has been reflected in programmes which have been variously termed "child-centered, "play-based", "integrated" or "informal". Since the 1960's, Piagetian theory, with its emphasis on qualitatively different stages of development, has provided the major theoretical rationale for programmes of this type. While *Te Whaariki* also reflects recent perspectives on the early childhood curriculum which emphasise the importance of social and cultural contexts, its structure is essentially developmental. In accordance with developmental approaches, the document is organised according to the age-related concepts of infants,

toddlers and young children. The goals which relate to the five overall aims of Well-being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration reflect the more traditional terminology of developmental domains. Thus it can be concluded that it is primarily the nomenclature of the five aims which differs. Carr and May (1994), as the project directors, have argued that the *Te Whaariki* model avoids the artificial divisions of the early childhood curriculum into developmental domains. Nevetheless, there is no compelling reason why the divisions associated with the five *Te Whaariki* aims should be any less artificial. Arbitrary distinctions are inevitable in a holistic curriculum approach if goals are to be established for planning and evaluation purposes. Hence, given the holistic, integrated nature of an early childhood curriculum it is unlikely that a *Te Whaariki* programme based on the five aims would differ significantly from a developmental programme based on the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, language and creative domains.

I have argued elsewhere (Cullen, 1994) that developmental theory has not served early childhood education well, in that it has failed to make clear links between theory and practice. I have also suggested that one of the problems with a developmental perspective is that practitioners have expected developmental theory to do too much. As well as developmental theory, a curriculum for young children needs to take into account educational principles and the values reflected in the broader society (Spodek & Saracho, 1990). These dimensions are addressed in the *Te Whaariki* rationale but there is a risk that in responding to the developmental elements of the guidelines, which affirm much of what is currently happening in early education, the early childhood community will neglect the challenges embedded in the new guidelines. Indeed, *Te Whaariki*'s subtitle, "Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services" hints that this could occur. For example, teacher awareness of cultural influences on emergent literacy can be at risk if research-based developmental sequences based on average achievements of individuals in another culture underpin a developmental curriculum (Clay, 1991). Further, individual children rarely follow the developmental "pathway" reflected in group-based research data.

The term "developmentally appropriate practice" was popularised by the influential North American professional body, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), when it published its position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987). The NAEYC statement adopted a normative perspective on development by proposing that programmes for young children should be based on age-related guidelines. The problem with this approach is that as developmental researchers increasingly focus on contexts and culture, knowledge about sequences of development becomes increasingly problematic (Bolton, 1989; Clay, 1991). To a certain extent, the normative focus of developmentally-appropriate programmes can be balanced by the second recommended feature of developmentally appropriate practice, individual appropriateness. The concept of individual appropriateness promotes a more dynamic perspective on development by acknowledging the influence of individual experiences in families, communities and societies which bring about change over time (Katz & Chard, 1990). Although not explicitly acknowledged or elaborated in the 1987 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice, this dynamic perspective is consistent with theories of child development and learning which emphasise the role of cultural and social contexts in development and learning (e.g. Bruner & Haste, 1987: Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993;

Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Subsequent NAEYC publications (e.g. NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991) have been more explicit in acknowledging the implications of sociocultural theories for appropriate practice. Accordingly, recent publications place greater stress on the role of adult-child interactions and the active role of the adult in guiding children's learning. From this perspective, it can be argued that if educators take the dynamic perspective on development seriously they will be sensitive to cultural and contextual influences. This interpretation reflects the assumption of sociocultural theories that learning styles and knowledge bases arise from differing social contexts. This also appears to be the view adopted by the *Te Whaariki* rationale which includes both individually appropriate and culturally appropriate experiences. Nevertheless, the alignment of *Te Whaariki* with the concept of developmentally appropriate practice remains a potential weakness in that it can encourage practitioners to identify with traditional normative perspectives on development which are no longer tenable on the basis of current theory and research (Clay, 1991). This conservative interpretation of *Te Whaariki* is also likely to be sustained by the longstanding tradition of free-play programmes in New Zealand which have tended to de-emphasise the active role of adults in favour of emphasising the Piagetian construct of the active child.

Although a developmental approach may successfully embrace cultural and community experiences, expectations and beliefs if a dynamic perspective on development is incorporated, the ability to integrate the two bodies of knowledge effectively is likely to pose difficulties for early childhood practitioners. The dynamic perspective on development is justified by a complex body of research generated by the somewhat inaccessible theories of Vygotsky, Wertsch, Bruner and others of a sociocultural persuasion. While early childhood researchers now acknowledge the implications of these theories for early childhood practice (e.g. Fleer, in press; Smith, 1993), the arguably more difficult task of translating them into practice remains a considerable challenge for New Zealand's current practitioners whose theoretical knowledge is often constrained by piecemeal or incomplete training. The research literature has only recently addressed issues of relationships between perspectives derived from Vygotskian and Piagetian traditions (Glassman, 1994; Hatano, 1993); to expect practitioners to make this conceptual leap is asking a lot.

References to the literature to justify the sociocultural perspective are necessarily brief in *Te Whaariki*, consequently there is an urgent need for early childhood training to provide a strong theoretical grounding in the dynamic aspects of child development. In this regard, it is an unfortunate fact of life for early childhood tertiary educators and training providers that the majority of basic textbooks on early childhood education still adopt a predominantly normative perspective. Recent enthusiasm for Bruner's concept of *scaffolding*, in order to embrace the more interactive perspectives on learning and development emanating from sociocultural theories, does not necessarily negate this criticism. Scaffolding refers to the process of adult "supports and connections that are removed and replaced when and where they are needed" (*Te Whaariki*, 1993, p.14) and is a concept which should, theoretically, fit well with the informal nature of early childhood programmes. If used effectively, scaffolding approaches can provide adult support and guidance which are sensitive to the child's current level of functioning and unique characteristics. However, the conditions of effective scaffolding are by no means clear for researchers (Stone, 1993); the application of the scaffolding metaphor in the culturally diverse early childhood programmes in New Zealand is even more uncertain.

Rogoff, the North American psychologist who proposed the related concept of *guided participation* (which places greater emphasis on the interrelatedness of adult and children's roles in the learning situation) has recently stressed the importance of observing cultures other than those of the researchers to make cultural variations in guided participation more apparent (Rogoff, Mosier, Mistri & Goncu, 1993). This caution could usefully be applied in the New Zealand early childhood context. As an example, to what extent are the predominantly verbal forms of scaffolding identified in middle class samples by middle class researchers applicable to Maori, Pacific Island or Asian communities in New Zealand? Or pakeha working class families? Sociocultural researchers have recently noted that research interpretations of social or cultural on the basis of dyadic pairs involve an inadequate conception of the sociocultural dimension of Vygotsky's theory (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). Similarly, interpretations of scaffolding in early childhood education which focus primarily on informal adult-child interactions in play contexts of learning seem likely to neglect both the social organisation of instruction (Moll & Whitmore, 1993) and the social and cultural embeddedness of thought (Nicolopoulou & Cole, (1993). Along these lines, McNaughton's (1995) socialisation model of emergent literacy, which draws upon Samoan and Maori socialisation practices, indicates that attention to cultural and social contexts of learning provides valuable perspectives on young children's learning which can inform practice.

The particular issue of culturally appropriate forms of teaching for young children has been partly addressed by the emergence of *Te Kohanga Reo* movement and the Pacific Island language groups. Addressing the needs of minority group children in mainstream programmes is more problematic and in the absence of adequate research and resources in the field it is unlikely that the *Te Whaariki* goal of "belonging" will be achieved at more than a superficial level. While an important commitment to biculturalism has been made by the National Childcare Association, the Playcentre Federation, the Kindergarten Union and the Colleges of Education (Cooper & Tangaere, 1994) without support at the systemic level, practitioner efforts to meet the bicultural (and multicultural) goals of *Te Whaariki* may be very limited. Wider government support for research and development activities may be necessary if the claim of Cooper and Tangaere (1994) that Government shows no genuine commitment to acknowledging Maori language nor the Treaty of Waitangi within education is correct. Without such support there is a real danger that goals to do with cultural appropriateness could degenerate into the "tourist curriculum" criticised by Derman-Sparks and her North American colleagues (1989) in their rationale for the concept of an anti-bias early childhood curriculum. Further, there is a related risk that commercial interests will take up the challenge and produce inappropriate resources under the guise of *Te Whaariki*. The appearance of worksheets and black-line masters, albeit on a cultural theme, is an outcome which would not support the learning goals of *Te Whaariki*. There is also a major need in New Zealand for an early childhood professional body, such as NAEYC in North America, to disseminate early childhood research in order to inform and challenge early childhood practice. As an example, the Australian Early Childhood Association is shortly to publish an edited collection of articles on the theme *DAPcentrism: Challenging developmentally appropriate practice* (Fleer, in press) which exemplifies the type of research-based resource which is scarce in New Zealand.

A further concern arises from the Ministry of Education's decision to implement widespread professional development during 1995 (Report on Early Childhood Curriculum Development, 1995). While the commitment to preparing teachers for curriculum implementation is commendable it can be argued that this move is premature, in that training providers have not "caught up" with the theoretical developments which justify the new guidelines. Farquhar's (1995) analysis of the qualifications of early childhood staff in colleges of education reveals the extent of this problem. When providers of pre-service training and professional development contracts themselves have a restricted knowledge base it is unlikely that the theoretical richness of *Te Whaariki* will be conveyed effectively. The most likely outcome is that the guidelines will be interpreted on the basis of existing philosophies and practices with an "overlay" of the new terminology. Comments from Murrow's (1995) review of practitioners' opinions of the document support this view. Statements such as "It's good to have put into words what we promote" suggest that practitioners are perceiving the guidelines in terms of current philosophy and practice.

In summary, I suggest there is a theoretical tension inherent in *Te Whaariki*'s philosophy between the notions of developmental appropriateness and cultural appropriateness. Early childhood professionals with a sophisticated understanding of the relevant bodies of literature may be able to reconcile these different traditions. For the busy practitioner, implementation of *Te Whaariki* is likely to be constrained by a superficial understanding of its rationale and implications for practice.

Links with the National Curriculum

A feature of *Te Whaariki* is its attention to continuity between early childhood education and the school curriculum. In this section, links between National Curriculum Statements for Mathematics and Science, as the two subject areas available at the time the early childhood guidelines were developed, are identified. The focus on continuity is consistent with trends in other countries. In Australia, a 1981 review of preschool education (Commonwealth Dept of Education, 1981) identified the issue of educational continuity between preschool and infant primary school education as one of the key questions to be addressed in the early childhood sector. In North America, the extension of the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice to include primary classes (NAEYC, 1988) was in part guided by concern about formality in the junior classes and the downward flow of academic programmes to the preschool years. Studies of the transition to school in both the United Kingdom (Cleave, Jowett & Bate, 1982) and New Zealand (Renwick, 1984) which identified major discontinuities in children's learning experiences when they commenced school also highlight a need to address preschool-school relationships.

In terms of reports and government actions, continuity appears to have been an issue for the 1980's, however, in New Zealand there is little evidence that continuity issues received much attention by educators. While some education systems addressed the continuity issue by producing subject-based curriculum guidelines for the non-compulsory preschool year prior to school entry (for example, the Western Australian *First Steps* programme in literacy is of this type), New Zealand early childhood education has not moved in this direction. Acknowledging links with the school curriculum is an important step for early childhood educators whose nervousness of

"formal" learning contexts is well known. Few early childhood educators accept uncritically a philosophy that the purpose of early childhood programmes is to prepare children for school. Yet advances in our understanding of young children's learning do provide a rationale for a philosophy which aims to promote children's learning in areas which subsequently feed into the school curriculum. For example, research on children's domain knowledge indicates that very young children build their own theories of the world at a very young age (Wellman & Gelman, 1992). This perspective is explicit in *Te Whaariki's* Exploration Goal 4 which states that (children) "develop working theories for making sense of the living, physical, and material worlds" (p.40). In this sense, early childhood programmes may have an important role in building upon children's early domain knowledge. While the research underpinning the notion of foundational theories of core domains is specialised, the implications it holds for the early childhood curriculum are highly consistent with the widespread view that programmes for young children should relate meaningfully to their everyday lives. (See "Educationally Appropriate Experiences", *Te Whaariki*, 1994, p.14.) Continuity with school is not nearly as threatening when perceived in these terms. An important qualification to this perspective is that adults who work with young children should be sensitive to children's interests, and have the teaching strategies and subject knowledge which allow them to extend children's foundational knowledge.

Again there are implications for the type of training early childhood teachers receive. With visions of subject-based curricula more typical of primary schools, early childhood educators are understandably cautious about stressing the place of content in an early childhood curriculum. Yet it is difficult to envisage the nurturing of young children's early domain knowledge in early childhood programmes unless the adults who work with children are confident in the subject areas reflected in children's attempts to understand their world. Bruce (1987), a British early childhood educator, has described the role of the adult as linking knowledge and the child through the environment. A similar point has been made in the North American context by Elkind (1989) who describes the teacher as "a matchmaker between child and materials" (p. 47). Unfortunately, like many principles and maxims in early childhood education this compelling idea can be difficult to translate into effective practice. To date, early childhood training has emphasised both the child, through studies of child development, and the planning of stimulating learning environments; the missing dimension has tended to be knowledge, in the form of subject studies. Recent debate by Aubrey (1994) and Pramling (1995) suggests that teachers' subject knowledge is important in promoting young children's learning. Accordingly, it is to be hoped that teacher educators are not tempted to organise curriculum coursework on the basis of the *Te Whaariki* framework to the exclusion of essential subject studies such as mathematics or science. A related point is that the five aims for learning and development - well-being, belonging, contribution, commmunication, exploration - are weighted towards the social-emotional domains. Although cognitive dimensions of development and learning are embedded in the guidelines, the extent to which these will be acknowledged and extended by adults whose training has not incorporated subject studies or a strong foundation in current theories of cognition and learning which enable them to build upon children's early conceptualisations, is debatable.

The absence of a collaborative approach to curriculum development with primary colleagues is a weakness of the continuity focus in the New Zealand early childhood guidelines. As Young-Loveridge's (1989) work on number development has indicated,

young children arrive at school with knowledge and skills which new entrant teachers should build upon. An understanding of the types of learning experiences young children engage in before they reach school is essential to this process. It is also worth noting that closer collaboration of early childhood and primary teachers is warranted in curriculum matters because of school entry policies which allow children to commence school at age five. In many education systems these children would still be in programmes staffed by early childhood teachers, meeting goals deemed to be appropriate for an early childhood curriculum. (See, for instance, literature on Sweden, United States, Australia as examples of Westernised countries with later school entry ages.) Neither the literature on school entry nor the literature on development and learning can provide definitive guidelines on school entry ages, accordingly, there is some logic to the suggestion that in addition to linking learning in the early childhood years with primary school curricula *Te Whaariki* aims should also permeate junior school classrooms.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are critical to the implementation of an effective early childhood curriculum. In *Te Whaariki*, the goals and aims are couched primarily in terms of what the adult should do rather than what the child is expected to do. Consequently, the document provides a framework for teachers to evaluate their programmes but is less definitive in the area of assessment of individual children. The holistic nature of early childhood programmes reflects the equally holistic nature of young children's learning so the difficulty of providing clear guidelines for assessment is inherent in the model adopted by *Te Whaariki*. A recent survey of assessment practices in early childhood centres (Wilks, 1993) gives little reason to believe that teachers will bring an existing repertoire of skills to the assessment task. According to Wilks only 41 percent of centres use any written form of assessment, and observation procedures tend to be problem-based, instead of including all children.

Kelly (1992) argues that the use of assessment in early education should be guided by formative and educational purposes rather than summative or administrative purposes. Dynamic models of development and learning suggest that the most effective form of assessment occurs when assessment and instruction are integrated in teaching-learning situations. In this model, adults guide children's learning by interacting with them in ways which are sensitive to the child's current level of functioning (Hills, 1992). In contrast, a normative model of assessment is more likely to promote a checklist approach to assessment whereby adults compare a child's current level of performance with an expected sequence of development. The *Te Whaariki* model does not promote a normative view of assessment but in the absence of guidelines about appropriate assessment procedures it seems unlikely that an integrated model of assessment, curriculum and instruction will eventuate. The assessment issue is of particular concern at a time when a competency-based approach to training is to be implemented, given that competency perspectives on development and learning are likely to promote a checklist approach to assessment, with associated problems of trivialising objectives of learning (Cullen, 1994). Murrow's (1995) review of early childhood workers' opinions on *Te Whaariki* found that the section on planning, evaluation and assessment was perceived as less useful than other sections. Further research and development on assessment and

evaluation will be critical if the *Te Whaariki* curriculum model is to translate into effective programmes for children.

There is a further concern relating to programme evaluation, specifically, the adequacy of the *Te Whaariki* model for promoting and assessing programme quality. Programme evaluation concerns at least two groups: teachers with responsibility for specific programmes, and external agencies charged with monitoring the standards of early childhood services. In New Zealand, the Education Review Office (ERO) has the latter responsibility. The early childhood sector has several mechanisms for monitoring quality assurance, in the form of licensing regulations, qualifications, and the 1991 Statement of Desirable Principles and Practices (DOPS). In order to receive government funding, centres are required to have a charter which incorporates the DOPS. ERO reviews how well centres are meeting their obligations under the DOPS. In May 1995, the Ministry of Education announced a policy move towards greater quality assurance. This is to include "the development of specific quality standards" and "development of self-evaluation procedures" (p. 5), to be incorporated into the DOPS. At this point in time the relationship of DOPS to *Te Whaariki* is unclear. If it is to function as an effective guide to practice *Te Whaariki* needs to be integrally linked with programme evaluation. From the practitioner's point of view it is unsatisfactory, and probably discouraging, to have different sets of criteria to guide practice. This current lack of clarity for practitioners is reflected in the following quote from an early childhood worker (Murrow, 1995, p. 17): "There needs to be practical support for its [Te Whaariki] implementation - eg, how do we effectively use it to meet ERO requirements." Although it is probably unrealistic to expect a single curriculum document to incorporate all the indicators of quality on which external reviews should be based it is important that the relationship between ongoing internal programme evaluations (based on *Te Whaariki*) and external reviews is clear to early childhood educators. A recent statement from the Chief Review Officer of ERO, cited in a report on procedures used for monitoring quality in early childhood centres (Hurst, 1995), suggests there may be practical difficulties in establishing this relationship. With regard to the use of *Te Whaariki* for monitoring purposes if it became a legal document, the Chief Review Officer is quoted as saying: "at the moment, we would have some difficulty regarding it as a sufficiently robust framework for evaluating educational effectiveness" (p .30).

That teachers are experiencing difficulty in objectively applying the *Te Whaariki* model to programme evaluation is illustrated further in the following example. Early childhood practitioners undergoing a basic early childhood training course at university were asked to evaluate their programme using the aims and goals of *Te Whaariki*. Although some students were able to note areas for development (usually on aspects of cultural appropriateness) the major response was one of self-congratulation at the extent to which their programme conformed to *Te Whaariki*. This would not have been a concern if the framework had been applied appropriately. What did concern the markers was the diverse range of practices, from worksheets through to "teaching numbers", which were able to be justified on the basis of *Te Whaariki*. While part of this confusion undoubtedly stemmed from the limited knowledge base of the students their response does lead to an uncomfortable conclusion that by adopting a holistic model, there *are* no clear criteria for evaluative purposes. The ambiguity students responded to may also illustrate a claim expressed in the British literature that the commonality of language of early childhood education is not reflected in practice (e.g. McAuley & Jackson, 1992). If

this is a correct interpretation of these practitioners' perceptions it suggests that *Te Whaariki* alone will not reduce the gaps between theory and practice .

Looking Forward

Somewhere between drafts the subtitle of *Te Whaariki* changed from "Draft Curriculum Guidelines" to "Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes". The reasons for this change in emphasis have not been publicised. It is perhaps ironical that in avoiding the stronger term of curriculum the title now incorporates the equally debatable concept of developmentally appropriate practice. While the critical literature on this concept was slight at the time the early childhood curriculum project was initiated, it has subsequently escalated to a degree (e.g. Kessler, 1991; Fowell & Lawton, 1992) that has led NAEYC to publish rejoinders (e.g. Bredekamp, 1993) and announce plans to review the position statement. In relation to the New Zealand context, Spodek's (1991) criticism of developmentally appropriate practice as conservative, is perhaps the most relevant.

There are probably many early childhood educators who would be prepared to live with a flawed concept of developmentally appropriate practice if it protects New Zealand's children from the worst excesses of curriculum innovations which have inadvertently promoted the use of commercially-produced worksheets and sterile activity-based programmes that are not responsive to children's interests, needs, or levels of understanding. If New Zealand's early childhood educators are fully conversant with the theoretical underpinnings of *Te Whaariki*, the concept of developmentally appropriate practice will be enriched by an understanding of dynamic perspectives on development, particularly those theories which emphasise the importance of interactions with parents, teachers, peers, siblings and others who can guide learning. As long as adults understand their own role in promoting development and learning then *Te Whaariki* has the potential to take early childhood education beyond maxims and slogans such as "play is the child's work" to incorporate an informed understanding of recent perspectives on children's development and learning. This will require quality training and on-going support for professional development. Without this support structure the abstract concepts and sophisticated body of knowledge contained in *Te Whaariki's* rationale and structure are likely to be major impediments to effective curriculum implementation.

Ironically, the "grandparenting" scheme devised to upgrade early childhood qualifications may be a limiting factor in this regard. Until it ceased in December 1994, the grandparenting scheme allowed early childhood practitioners to gain licensing points, or equivalency with an early childhood qualification, on the basis of previous experience and a variety of different types of qualifications and courses, deemed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to be equivalent to the benchmark of three year training. When "qualifications" are gained on the basis of experience or "equivalent" training, opportunities for in-depth, integrated and advanced studies can be lost, and the meaning of qualifications can be undermined (Bissland, 1992). In addition, the proliferation of private training providers in the early childhood sector raises an additional set of questions about quality of training courses in early education (Farquhar, 1994).

Meanwhile, what has happened to the notion of an early childhood curriculum? Is the disappearance of the term curriculum from the title a recognition that the *Te*

Whaariki guidelines do not constitute a curriculum *per se*? Lilian Katz, a leading North American early childhood educator has recently argued that establishing a body of accepted principles of practice, based on cultural, ethical, developmental, and psychological criteria avoids the dilemma between standardisation of teaching practices based on a single curriculum model versus professionalisation. In the latter alternative the exercise of the professional's own judgement is based on advanced training and specialised knowledge. According to Katz (1994) this is not currently typical of early childhood practitioners; it is certainly not typical of New Zealand practitioners amongst whom graduate study or post-basic training is rare. *Te Whaariki* meets Katz's criteria for a body of principles, as does the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice. It remains to be seen whether *Te Whaariki* attracts a body of critical literature parallel to that initiated by the NAEYC statement. My personal wish is that it does. Not only will a critical literature assist with further development and refinement of the New Zealand body of principles encompassed in *Te Whaariki*, it will contribute to the growth of professionalism in the early childhood community and its ability to reflect critically about current practice. An early childhood curriculum should contribute to this sense of professionalism. Whether it avoids the claim of conservatism by critics of the concept of developmentally appropriate practice has still to be established. A critical factor in this regard will be the receptivity of the early childhood community to recent perspectives which challenge entrenched ideas.

To date, *Te Whaariki* has been greeted with enormous enthusiasm by the early childhood profession, to the extent that it has taken on a gospel-like status, somewhat akin to the enthusiasm with which new entrant teachers adopted the Orange Mathematics Handbook for Junior Classes as a "bible" in the early sixties. Just as I, as a beginning teacher, did not appreciate the full implications of the Orange Handbook until I subsequently attended university and studied Piagetian theory (the unacknowledged basis of the Orange Handbook) I expect that today's early childhood teachers will more fully appreciate the richness of the *Te Whaariki* model when they have the opportunity to study further the diversity of theoretical perspectives alluded to in the *Te Whaariki* rationale. It is the understanding of this theoretical richness which should guard against the use of the guidelines as a prescription and encourage its use as a set of principles to guide curriculum planning.

Conversely, if the application of *Te Whaariki* is reduced to "What do we do for 'belonging' on Monday?" it is unlikely that either effective programmes for young children or professional challenges to early childhood educators will eventuate. Moreover, the diversity of New Zealand's early childhood services could be at jeopardy. *Te Whaariki* contains high ideals but there is currently an enormous gap between practice and the achievement of those ideals. In turn, bridging this gap poses considerable challenges to policy makers and early childhood educators alike.

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